Natural Conditions Assessment for low pH Fourmile Creek Henrico County, Virginia

Submitted by

Virginia Department of Environmental Quality

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Executive Summary

This report presents the natural condition assessment for low pH in Fourmile Creek. The Fourmile Creek watershed is located in Henrico County in the James River Basin (USGS Hydrologic Unit Code 02080206). The waterbody identification code (WBID, Virginia Hydrologic Unit) for Fourmile Creek is VAP-G02R in the Coastal Plain region of Virginia.

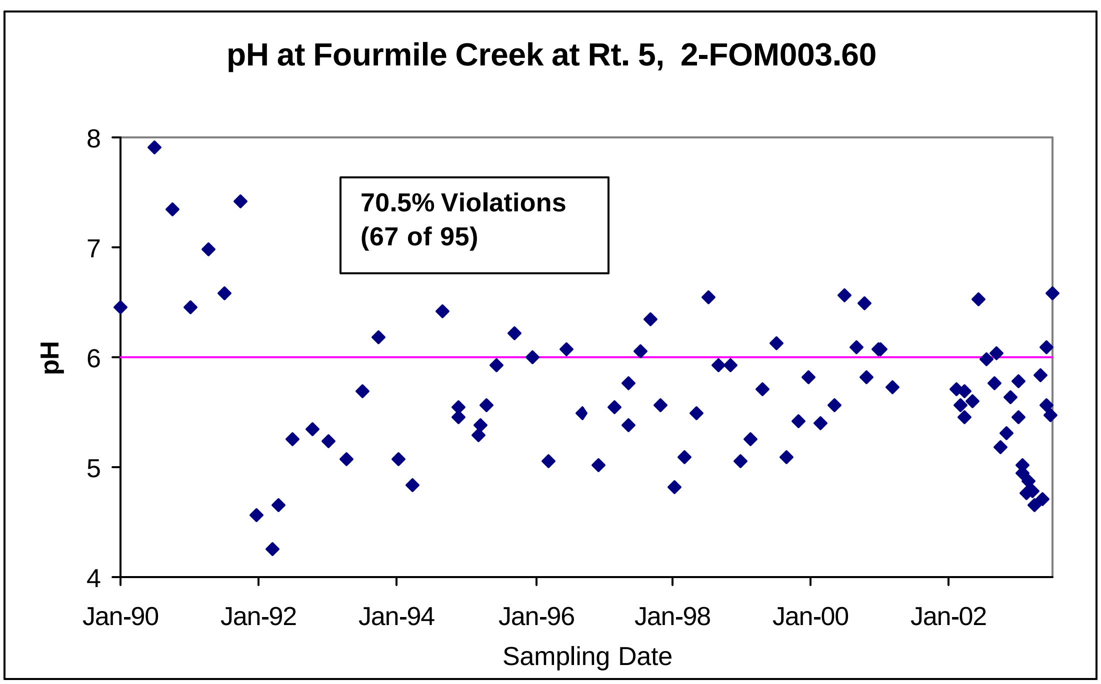
The impaired segment is 30.99 miles long. It contains the entire Fourmile Creek watershed, from its headwaters downstream to its confluence with the James River near rivermile 91 at Deep Bottom, opposite the north end of Jones Neck.

The drainage area of the Fourmile Creek watershed is approximately 21.0 square miles. The average annual rainfall as recorded at Richmond WSO airport, VA (within 8 miles of the study area) is 43.29 inches. The approximately 13,440 acre watershed is predominately forested (67.0 percent). Agriculture encompasses 24.4 percent of the watershed, with 13.5 percent cropland and 10.9 pasture/hayland. Residential and high use industrial areas compose approximately 6.0 percent of the land base. Quarry activities account for 1.3 percent of the land use. The remaining 1.1 percent of the watershed is comprised of wetlands and open water.

Fourmile Creek was listed as impaired on Virginia's 1998 303(d) Total Maximum Daily Load Priority List and Report and 2002 303(d) Report on Impaired Waters (VADEQ, 1998 & 2002) due to violations of the State's water quality standard for fecal coliform bacteria and pH. A bacteria TMDL was submitted to EPA on 8 July 2004. This report evaluates the pH impairment by determining if natural conditions are the cause of the impairment, thus obviating the need for a TMDL.

Out of 95 low pH values collected between January 1990 and August 2003, at station 2-FOM003.60, 67 were below the lower water quality standard for pH of pH 6 SU. (Figure E1).

Figure E1. pH at Fourmile Creek at Rt. 5, 2-FOM003.60, January 1990 and August 2003.



According to Virginia Water Quality Standards (9 VAC 25-260-10A), "all state waters are designated for the following uses: recreational uses (e.g., swimming and boating); the propagation and growth of a balanced indigenous population of aquatic life, including game fish, which might be reasonably expected to inhabit them; wildlife; and the production of edible and marketable natural resources (e.g., fish and shellfish)."

As indicated above, Fourmile Creek must support all designated uses by meeting all applicable criteria. The Fourmile Creek has been assessed as not supporting the aquatic life use due to the exceedance of the pH criteria that are designed to protect aquatic life in Class III waters.

In this document, VADEQ proposes a "Methodology for Determining if pH and DO Impairments in Streams are Due to Natural Conditions." This methodology is based on a study done by MapTech (MapTech 2003) and will be used here to determine if the pH impairments in Fourmile Creek are natural and if Fourmile Creek can be re-classified as Class VII (Swamp Waters).

The level of acidity as registered by pH in a water body is determined by a balance between organic acids produced by decay of vegetative material, and buffering capacity. Conditions in a stream that would typically be associated with naturally low pH include slow-moving, ripple-less waters or wetlands where the decay of organic matter produces organic acids. These situations can be compounded by anthropogenic activities that contribute excessive nutrients or readily available organic matter to these systems. The general approach to determine if DO and pH impairments in streams are due to natural conditions is to assess a series of water quality and hydrologic criteria to determine the likelihood of an anthropogenic source. A logical 4-step process for identifying natural conditions that result in low DO and/or pH levels and for determining the likelihood of anthropogenic impacts that will exacerbate the natural condition is described below.

Step 1. Determine slope and appearance.
Step 2. Determine nutrient levels.
Step 3. Determine degree of seasonal fluctuation (for DO only).
Step 4. Determine anthropogenic impacts.

Fourmile Creek exhibits low slope with significant wetlands, and large areas of forested land including pine forests. These contribute large inputs of decaying vegetation, which produce organic acids and lower pH as they decay. These are not considered anthropogenic impacts.

Fourmile Creek exhibits low nutrient concentrations below national background levels in streams from undeveloped areas, which are not indicative of human impact.

Three permittees have insignificant low pH impact. Residential / Commercial land use (< 2%) has only a minor pH effect on the headwaters area. There is no pH impact observed downstream at Rt. 5 attributed to human activity.

Lack of buffering capacity due to soil composition and vegetative decay in swampy watersheds below the Fall Line appear to impact instream low pH more than acid deposition. However the extent to which stream pH is decreased by acid deposition cannot be conclusively determined.

Based on the above findings, a change in the water quality standards classification to Class VII Swamp Water due to natural conditions, rather than a TMDL, is indicated for Fourmile Creek and its tributaries to their headwaters. If there is a 305(b)/303(d) assessment prior to the reclassification, Fourmile Creek will be assessed as Category 4C, Impaired due to natural condition, no TMDL needed.

The development of the Fourmile Creek low pH natural condition assessment was subject to public participation. A Technical Advisory Committee meeting was held at the Piedmont Regional Office training room in Glen Allen, VA at 2 pm on January 13, 2004. A public meeting was held at the Fairfield Area Library, 1001 North Laburnum Avenue, Richmond, VA. at 7 pm on January 29, 2004. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss both the process for low pH natural condition assessment and the bacterial TMDL. Twelve persons attended the public meeting. Copies of the presentation materials were available for public distribution. The public meeting was public noticed in the Virginia Register. There was a 30-day public comment period after the public meeting. Fourteen questions were asked at the public meeting, and three written comments were mailed to DEQ. These comments and responses dealt with the bacterial impairment and were submitted to EPA separately from this document.

1. Introduction

Fourmile Creek was listed as impaired on Virginia's 1998 303(d) Total Maximum Daily Load Priority List and Report and 2002 303(d) Report on Impaired Waters (VADEQ, 1998 & 2002) due to violations of the State's water quality standard for fecal coliform bacteria and pH. A bacteria TMDL was submitted to EPA on 8 July 2004. This report evaluates the pH impairment by determining if natural conditions are the cause of the impairment, thus obviating the need for a TMDL.

2. Physical Setting

2.1. Listed Water Bodies

Fourmile Creek is located in Henrico County in the James River Basin (USGS Hydrologic Unit Code 02080206). The waterbody identification code (WBID, Virginia Hydrologic Unit) for Fourmile Creek is VAP-G02R. There are 30.99 total stream miles in the Fourmile watershed (National Hydrography Dataset (NHD). The impaired segment is 30.99 miles long. It contains the entire Fourmile Creek watershed, from its headwaters downstream to its confluence with the James River near rivermile 91 at Deep Bottom, opposite the north end of Jones Neck (Figure 1).

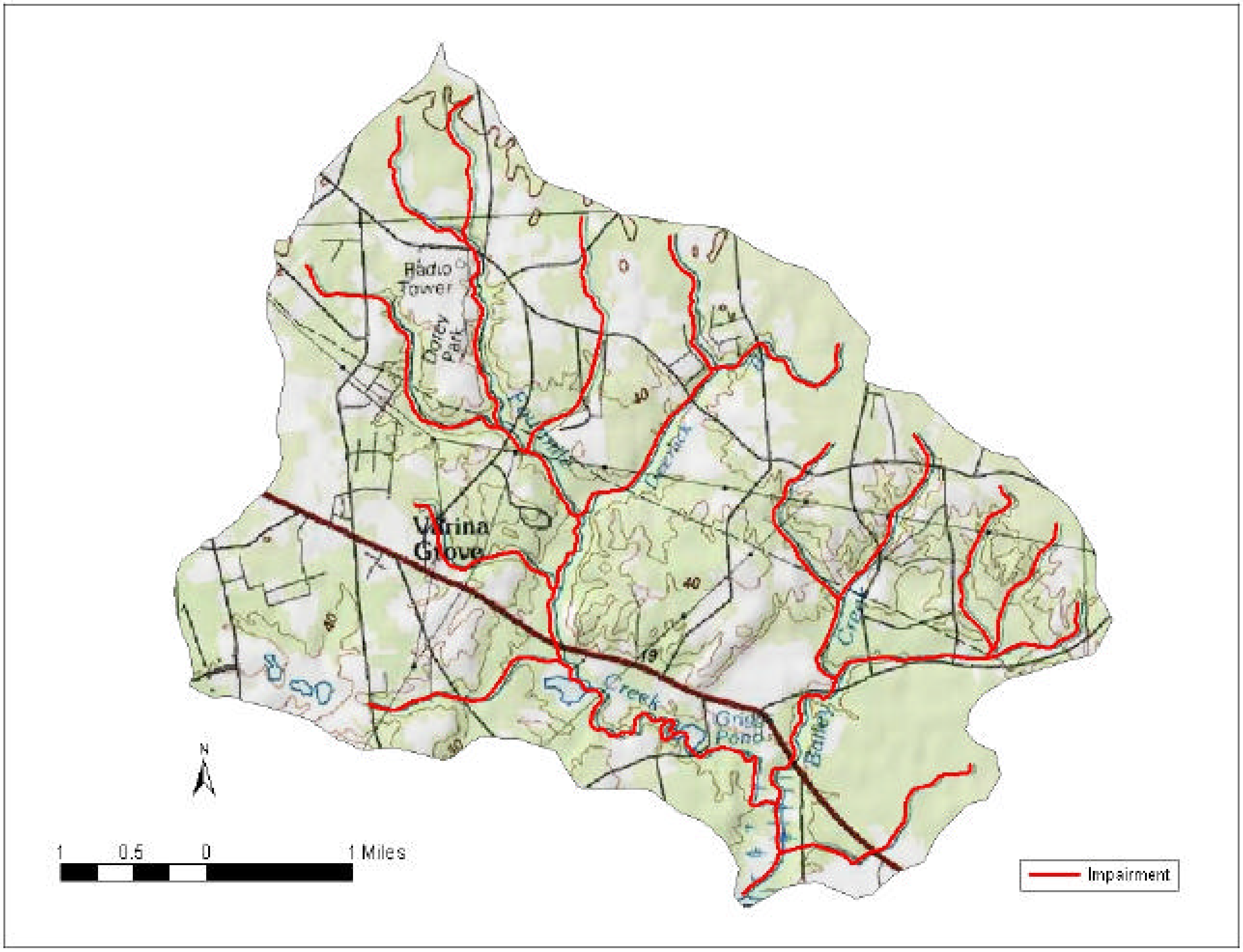
2.1.1 Listed Water Bodies

The impaired segment is 30.99 miles long. It contains the entire Fourmile Creek watershed, from its headwaters downstream to its confluence with the James River near rivermile 91 at Deep Bottom, opposite the north end of Jones Neck, as described in Table 1. Impairments are low pH and fecal coliform bacteria. The fecal coliform bacteria impairment was addressed separately from this document and a bacteria TMDL was submitted to EPA in July 2004. The TMDL is still under review.

Table 1. Impaired segment description (Fourmile Creek)

Segment (segment ID)	Impairment (source of impairment)	Upstream Limit Description	Downstream Limit Description	Miles Affected
Fourmile Creek (VAP-G02R)	Fecal Coliform (unknown), PH (unknown)	Headwaters	Confluence with James River (rivermile 91 at Deep Bottom)	30.99

Figure 1. Map of the Fourmile Creek study area



2.2. Watershed

2.2.1. General Description

Fourmile Creek, located entirely within Henrico County, is a minor tributary to the James River. It is about 8.2 miles long and flows southeastward from its headwaters south of Richmond International Airport to its confluence with the James River. The watershed itself is approximately 6 miles long and 5 miles wide, having an area of 21.0 square miles. The major tributaries to Fourmile Creek are Sweeney and Bailey Creeks, which enter from the east (Sweeney Creek is a tributary of Bailey Creek), and Deerlick Branch, which enters from the north. There is no continuous flow gaging station on Fourmile Creek.

2.2.2. Geology, Climate, Land Use

Geology and Soils

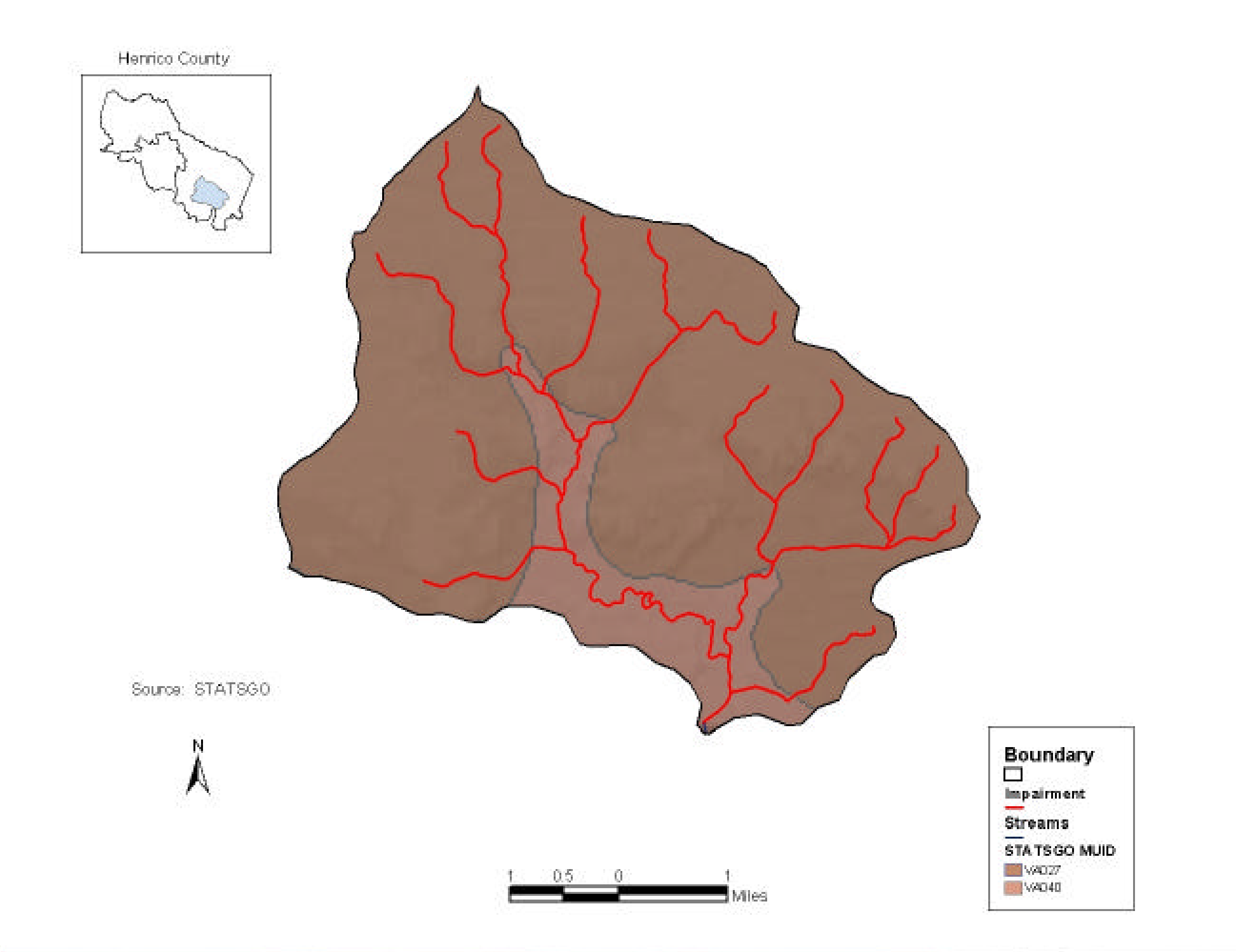
Fourmile Creek is in the Atlantic Coastal Plain physiographic region. The Atlantic Coastal Plain is the easternmost of Virginia's physiographic provinces. The Atlantic Coastal Plain extends from New Jersey to Florida, and includes all of Virginia east of the Fall Line. The Fall Line is the easternmost extent of rocky river rapids, the point at which east-flowing rivers cross from the hard, igneous and metamorphic rocks of the Piedmont to the relatively soft, unconsolidated strata of the Coastal Plain. The Coastal Plain is underlain by layers of Cretaceous and younger clay, sand, and gravel that dip gently eastward. These layers were deposited by rivers carrying sediment from the eroding Appalachian Mountains to the west. As the sea level rose and fell, fossiliferous marine deposits were interlayered with fluvial, estuarine, and beach strata. The youngest deposits of the Coastal Plain are sand, silt and mud presently being deposited in our bays and along our beaches (http://www.geology.state.va.us/DOCS/Geol/coast.html).

Soils for the Fourmile Creek watershed were documented utilizing the VA State Soil Geographic Database (STATSGO). Two general soil types were identified using in this database. Descriptions of these soil series were derived from queries to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Official Soil Series Description web site (http://ortho.ftw.nrcs.usda.gov/cgi-bin/osd/osdname.cgi). Figure 2 shows the location of these general soil types in the watershed.

Soils of the Emporia-Johnston-Kenansville-Remlik-Rumford-Slagle-Suffolk-Tomotley (VA027) series are very deep to deep, and vary between well drained to poorly drained with moderately slow or slow permeability. They formed in moderately fine-textured stratified fluvial and marine sediments on the upper Coastal Plain and stream terraces.

Soils of the Bojac-Pamunkey-Munden-Angie-Augusta-Molena-Argent series (VA040) are very deep and range from excessively drained to poorly drained conditions. Permeability is moderately rapid to slow. This series, located on stream terraces and uplands, is composed of loamy and sandy fluvial and marine Coastal Plain sediments.

Figure 2. Soil Characteristics of the Fourmile Creek Watershed



Climate

The climate summary for Fourmile Creek comes from a weather station located at Richmond WSO Airport, VA, with a period of record from 8/01/1948 to 7/31/2003. The average annual maximum and minimum temperature (°F) at the weather station is 68.9 and 47.1 and the annual rainfall (inches) is 43.29 (Table 2) (Southeast Regional Climate Center, http://cirrus.dnr.state.sc.us/cgi-bin/sercc/cliMAIN.pl?va7201).

Table 2. Climate summary for Richmond WSO Airport, Virginia (447201)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual
Average Max. Temperature (F)	47.1	50.4	58.9	70.1	77.6	85.1	88.7	87.0	80.7	70.6	60.6	50.2	68.9
Average Min. Temperature (F)	27.5	29.5	36.2	45.3	54.4	63.0	67.9	66.6	59.3	47.3	37.8	30.2	47.1
Average Total Precipitation (in.)	3.20	3.03	3.83	2.99	3.69	3.59	4.94	4.73	3.58	3.38	3.14	3.19	43.29

Land Use

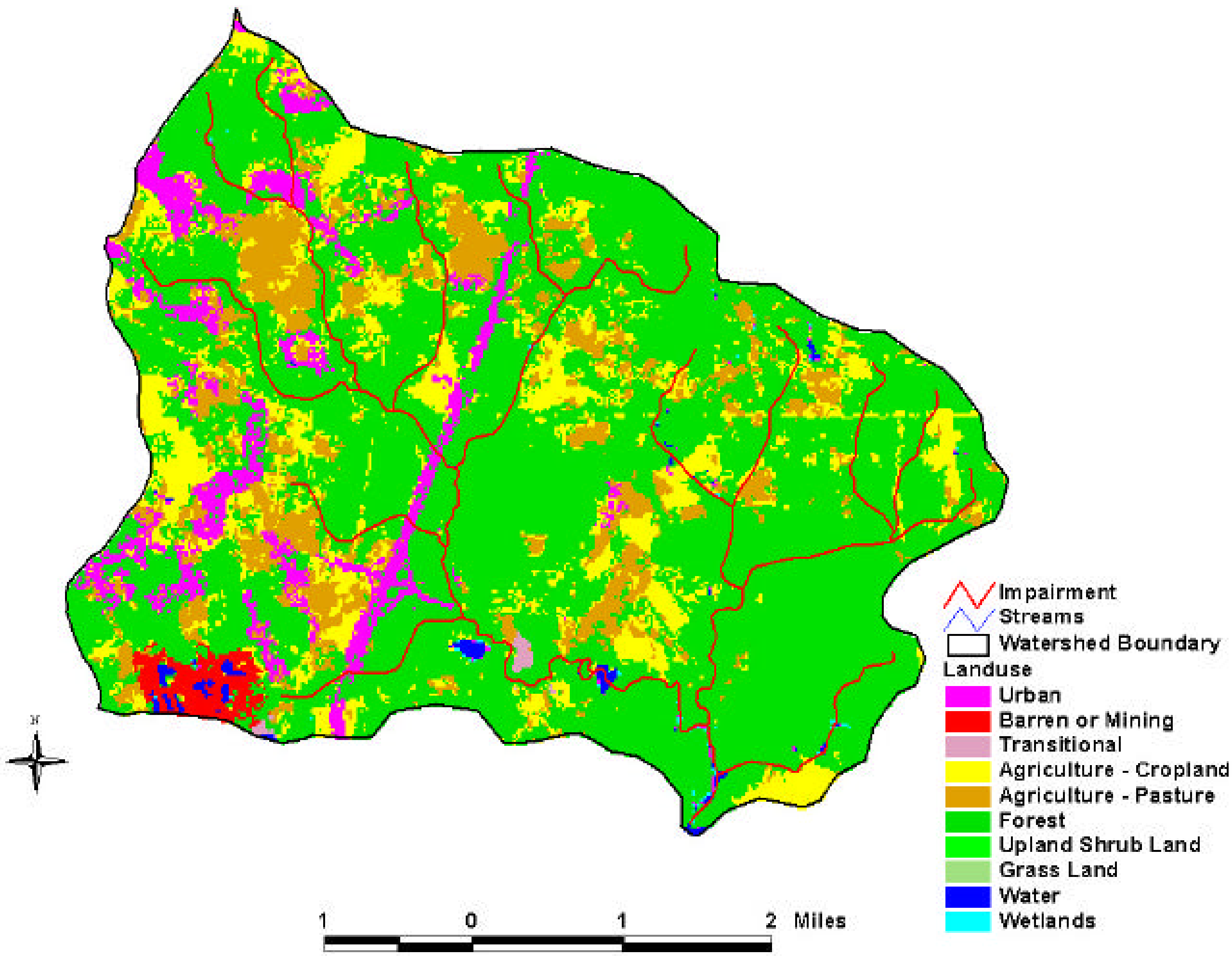
The Fourmile Creek watershed extends approximately 8 miles upstream from the stream's confluence with the James River and is approximately 5 miles wide. The approximately 13,440 acre watershed is predominately forested (67.0 percent). Agriculture encompasses 24.4 percent of the watershed, with 13.5 percent cropland and 10.9 pasture/hayland. Residential and high use industrial areas compose approximately 6.0 percent of the land base. Quarry activi ties account for 1.3 percent of the land use. The remaining 1.1 percent of the watershed is comprised of wetlands and open water.

A map of the distribution of land use in the watershed (Figure 3) shows that scattered urban land is found in the western portions of the watershed. Agriculture and forest land are scattered throughout the watershed.

Table 3. Land Use in the Four Mile Creek Watershed

Landuse Category	Area (acres)	Area (%)
Open Water	78.5	0.58
Low Intensity Residential	548.2	4.08
High Intensity Residential	0.2	0.00
High Intensity Commercial/Industrial	263.8	1.96
Quarries/Strip Mines/Gravel Pits	170.4	1.27
Transitional	24.9	0.19
Deciduous Forest	5233.0	38.94
Evergreen Forest	511.5	3.81
Mixed Forest	3253.0	24.21
Pasture/Hay	1466.0	10.91
Row Crops	1817.0	13.52
Emergent Herbaceous Wetlands	71.0	0.53
Total	13437.5 21.00 sq. mi.	100.00

Figure 3. Land Use in the Fourmile Creek Watershed



3. Description of Water Quality Problem/Impairment

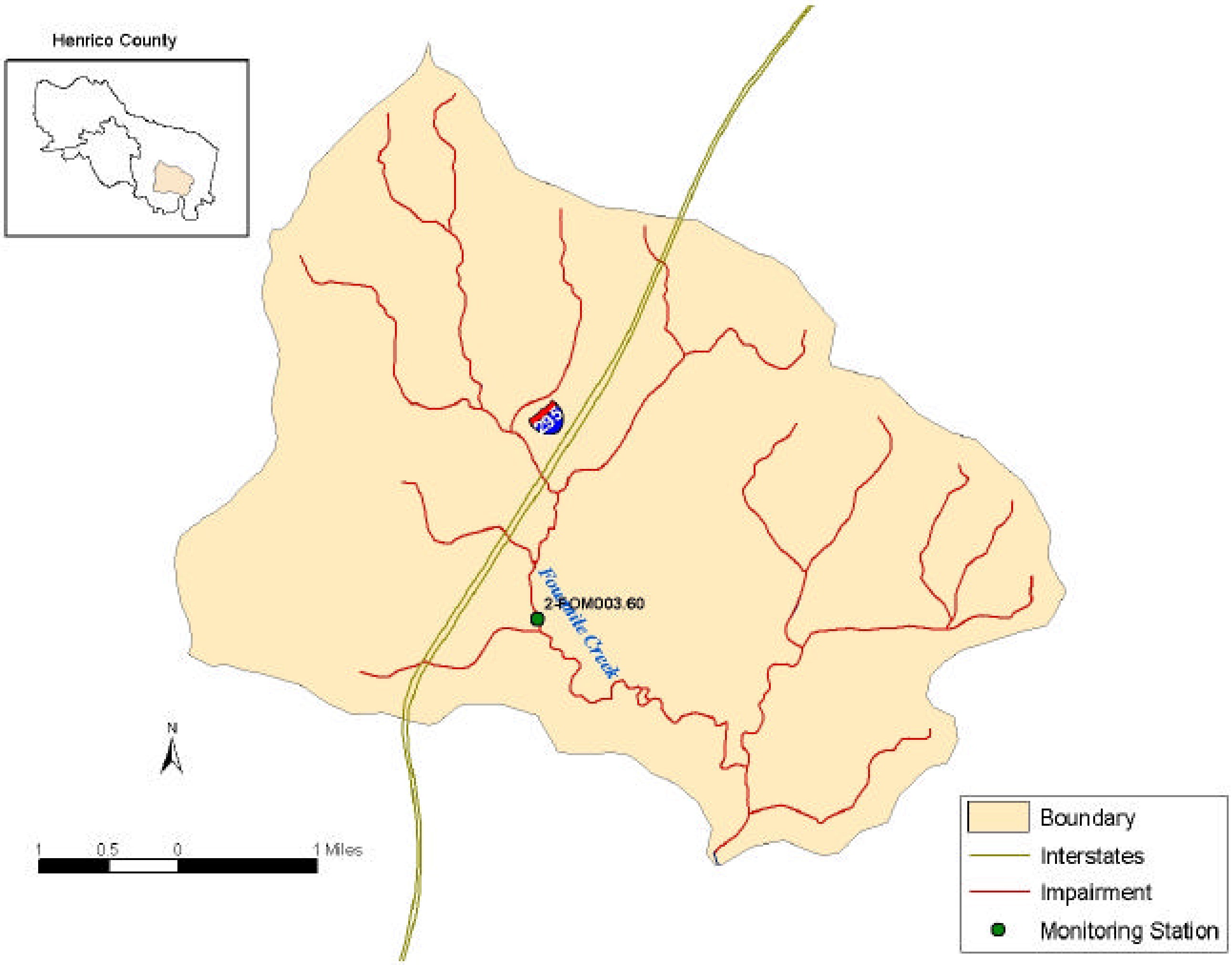
Fourmile Creek was listed as impaired on Virginia's 1998 and 2002 303(d) Total Maximum Daily Load Priority List and Report (VADEQ, 1998 & 2002) due to violations of the State's water quality standard for pH and fecal coliform bacteria. As stated above, this report addresses only the pH impairment. Out of 95 pH values collected between January 1990 and August 2003 at station 2-FOM003.60 (Figure 4), 67 were below the lower water quality standard for pH of pH 6 SU (Figure 5 and Table 4).

Table 4. pH data collected by DEQ on Fourmile Creek

				(SU)			
Station	**Date of First Sample**	**Date of Last Sample**	**Number of Samples**	**Average**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Number of Exceed-ances***
2-FOM003.60	01/17/1990	08/05/2003	95	5.69	4.26	7.91	67

* Exceedances of the minimum pH water quality standard of pH 6.0 SU.

Figure 4. Map of Fourmile Creek watershed with station 2-FOM003.60



A time series graph of all data collected at station 2-FOM003.60 shows the pH values ranging from pH 4.26 to 7.91 SU (Figure 5). The horizontal line at the pH 6 SU marks represents the minimum water quality standard. The data points below the pH 6.0 SU line illustrate violations of the water quality standard.

Figure 5. Time series of pH concentrations (station 2-FOM003.60)

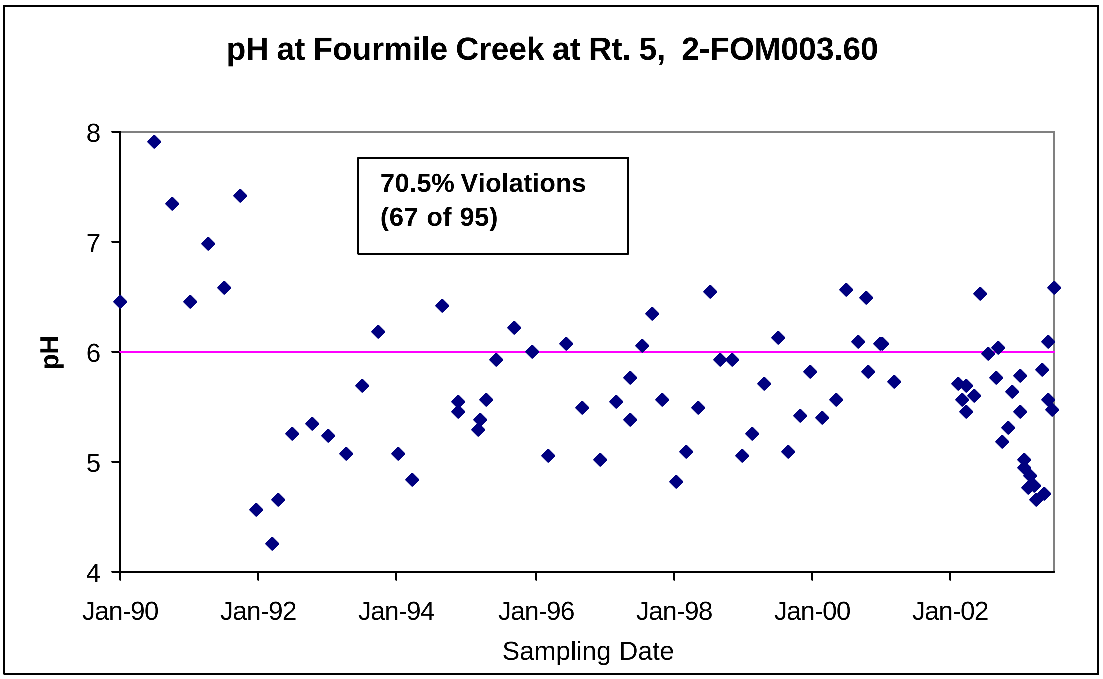
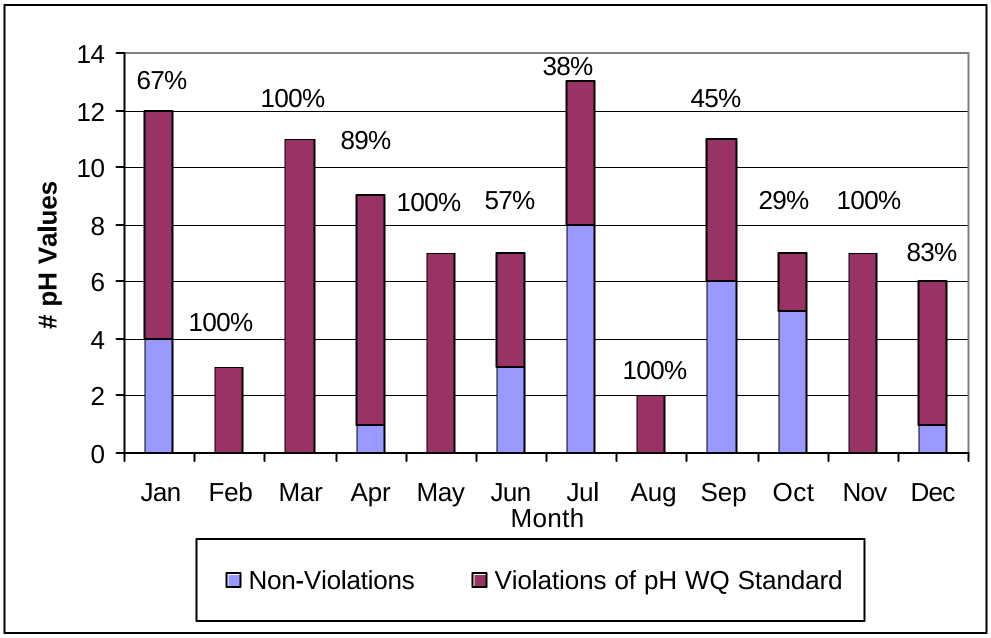


Figure 6 presents the number of pH readings and violations by month.

Figure 6. Monthly distribution of pH readings and violations (station 2-FOM003.60)



3.1 Associated Mainstem and Tributary site pH

DEQ added several associated mainstem and tributary monitoring stations during data collection for the low pH assessment of natural conditions or development of a TMDL. Associated station pH data are presented in Figures 7 - 11 below.

Figure 7. pH at Fourmile Creek at Kingsland Rd, 2-FOM001.85, below Griggs Pond.

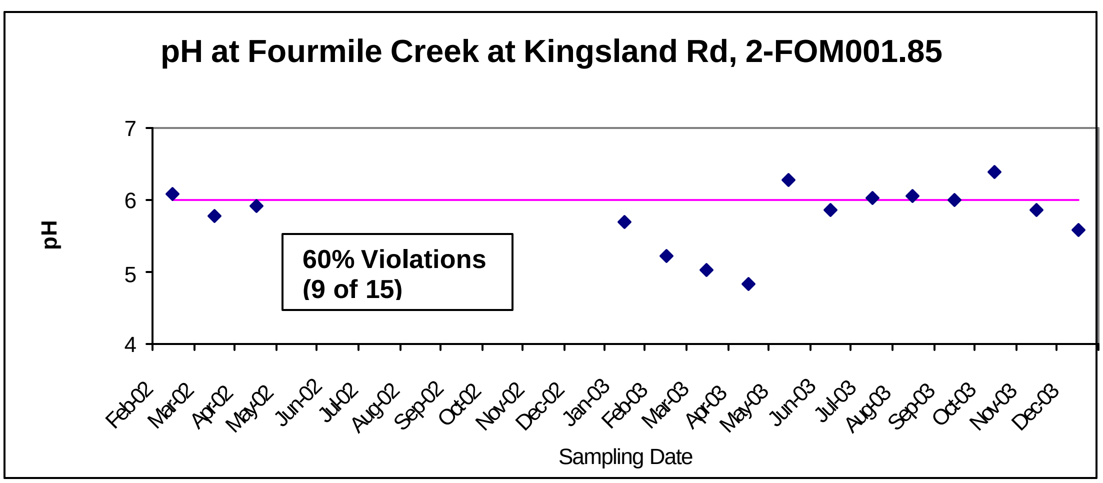


Figure 8. pH at Fourmile Creek at Doran Rd, 2-FOM005.49.

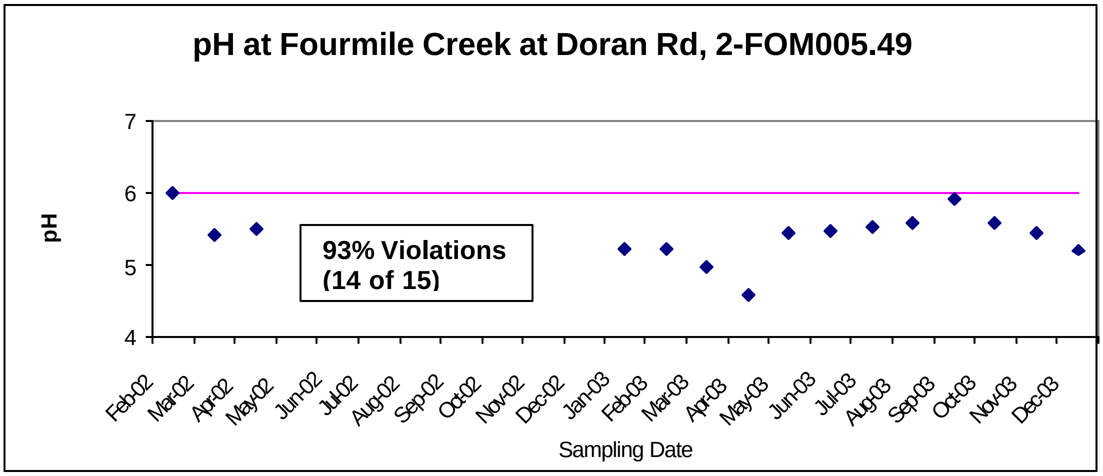


Figure 9. pH at Fourmile Creek at Darbytown Rd, 2-FOM006.87.

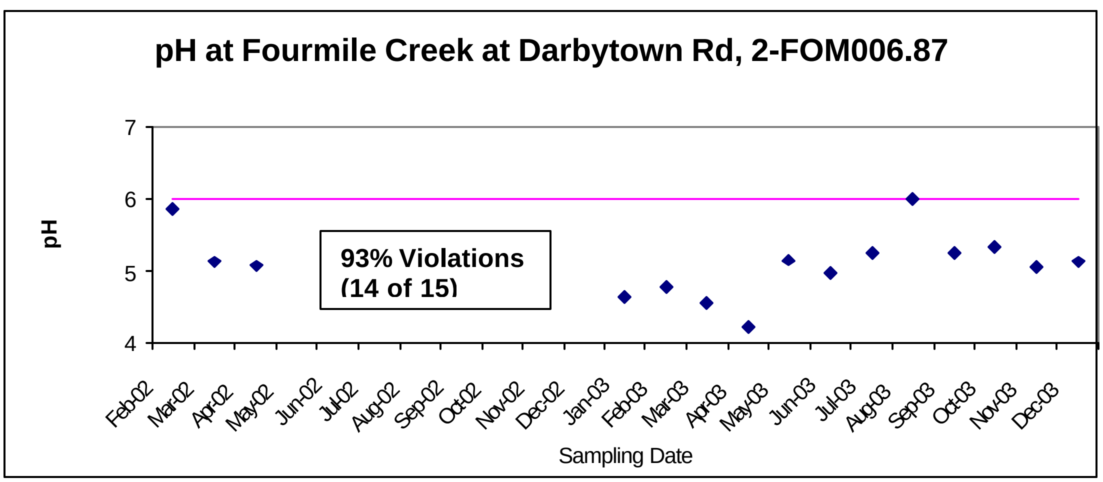


Figure 10. pH at Deerlick Branch at Darbytown Rd, 2-DLK001.19.

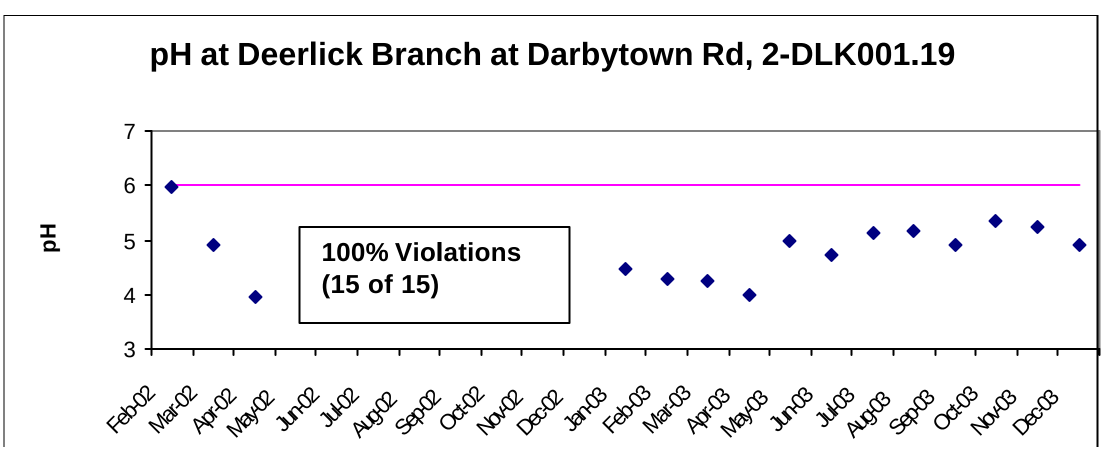
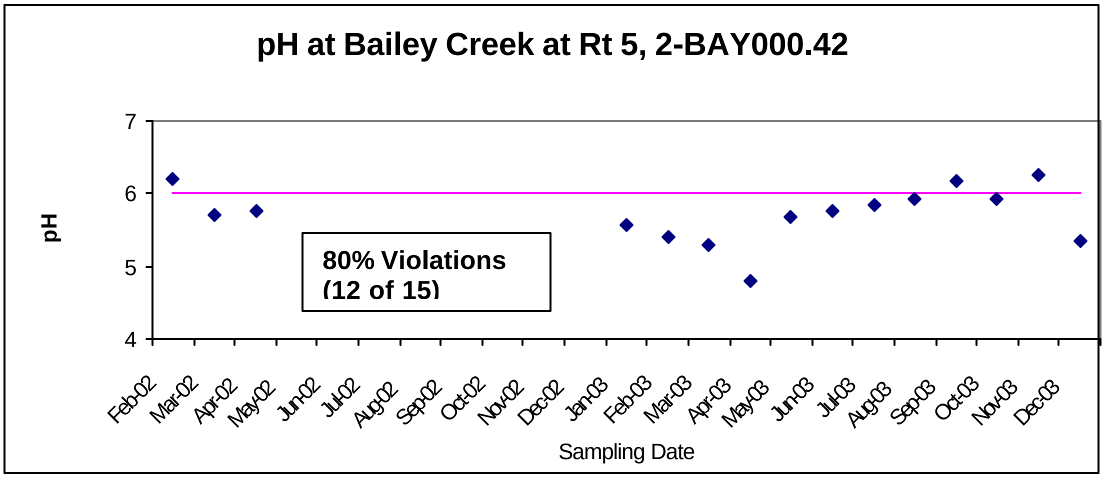


Figure 11. pH at Bailey Creek at Rt. 5, 2-BAY000.42.



4. Water Quality Standard

According to Virginia Water Quality Standards (9 VAC 25-260-5), the term *"water quality standards means provisions of state or federal law which consist of a designated use or uses for the waters of the Commonwealth and water quality criteria for such waters based upon such uses. Water quality standards are to protect the public health or welfare, enhance the quality of water and serve the purposes of the State Water Control Law (§62.1-44.2 et seq. of the Code of Virginia) and the federal Clean Water Act (33 USC §1251 et seq.)."*

As stated above, Virginia water quality standards consist of a designated use or uses and a water quality criteria. These two parts of the applicable water quality standard are presented in the sections that follow.

4.1. Designated Uses

According to Virginia Water Quality Standards (9 VAC 25-260-10A), *"all state waters are designated for the following uses: recreational uses (e.g., swimming and boating); the propagation and growth of a balanced indigenous population of aquatic life, including game fish, which might be reasonably expected to inhabit them; wildlife; and the production of edible and marketable natural resources (e.g., fish and shellfish)."*

As stated above, Fourmile Creek must support all designated uses by meeting all applicable criteria. The Fourmile Creek has been assessed as not supporting the aquatic life use due to the exceedance of the pH criteria that are designed to protect aquatic life in Class III waters.

4.2. Applicable Water Quality Criteria

The Class III water quality criteria for pH in the Fourmile Creek watershed is a minimum pH 6 SU and a maximum pH 9.0 SU.

Table 5. Applicable water quality standards

Parameter	Minimum pH SU	Maximum pH SU
pH	6.0	9.0

If the waterbody exceeds the criterion listed above in more than 10.5 percent of samples, the waterbody is classified as impaired and a TMDL must be developed and implemented to bring the waterbody into compliance with the water quality criterion. However, in the case of Fourmile Creek there is reason to believe that the waterbody has been mis-classified and that the apparent impairment is due to the swampy nature of the stream. In this document, VADEQ applies a proposed methodology for determining if DO and pH impairments in free-flowing streams are due to natural conditions. This methodology is based on a study done by MapTech in the Appomattox River Basin (MapTech 2003) and will be used here to determine if the pH impairments in Fourmile Creek are natural and if Fourmile Creek can be re-classified as Class VII (Swamp Waters).

5. Methodology for Natural Conditions Assessment

The level of acidity as registered by pH in a water body is determined by a balance between organic acids produced by decay of vegetative material, and buffering capacity. Conditions in a stream that would typically be associated with naturally low pH include slow-moving, ripple-less waters or wetlands where the decay of organic matter produces organic acids. These situations can be compounded by anthropogenic activities that contribute excessive nutrients or readily available organic matter to these systems. The general approach to determine if DO and pH impairments in streams are due to natural conditions is to assess a series of water quality and hydrologic criteria to determine the likelihood of an anthropogenic source. A logical 4-step process for identifying natural conditions that result in low DO and/or pH levels and for determining the likelihood of anthropogenic impacts that will exacerbate the natural condition is described below.

Step 1. Determine slope and appearance.
Step 2. Determine nutrient levels.
Step 3. Determine degree of seasonal fluctuation (for DO only).
Step 4. Determine anthropogenic impacts.

The results from this methodology (or process or approach) will be used to determine if the stream should be re-classified as Class VII Swamp Waters. Each step is described in detail below.

Procedure for Natural Condition Assessment of low pH and low DO in Virginia Streams

Prepared by Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
October 2004

I. INTRODUCTION

Virginia's list of impaired waters currently shows many waters as not supporting the aquatic life use due to exceedances of pH and/or DO criteria that are designed to protect aquatic life in Class III waters. However, there is reason to believe that most of these streams or stream segments have been mis-classified and should more appropriately be classified as Class VII, Swamp Waters. This document presents a procedure for assessing if natural conditions are the cause of the low pH and/or low DO levels in a given stream or stream segment.

The level of dissolved oxygen (DO) in a water body is determined by a balance between oxygen-depleting processes (*e.g.*, decomposition and respiration) and oxygen-restoring processes (*e.g.*, aeration and photosynthesis). Certain natural conditions promote a situation where oxygen-restoring processes are not sufficient to overcome the oxygen-depleting processes. The level of acidity as registered by pH in a water body is determined by a balance between organic acids produced by decay of vegetative material, and buffering capacity.

Conditions in a stream that would typically be associated with naturally low DO and/or naturally low pH include slow-moving, ripple-less waters. In such waters, the decay of organic matter depletes DO at a faster rate than it can be replenished and produces organic acids (tannins, humic and fulvic substances). These situations can be compounded by anthropogenic activities that contribute excessive nutrients or readily available organic matter to these systems.

The general approach to determine if DO and pH impairments in streams are due to natural conditions is to assess a series of water quality and hydrologic criteria to determine the likelihood of an anthropogenic source. A logical 4-step process for identifying natural conditions that result in low DO and/or pH levels and for determining the likelihood of anthropogenic impacts that will exacerbate the natural condition is described below. DEQ staff is proposing to use this approach to implement State Water Control Law 9 VAC 25-260-55, Implementation Procedure for Dissolved Oxygen Criteria in Waters Naturally Low in Dissolved Oxygen.

Waters that are shown to have naturally low DO and pH levels will be re-classified as Class VII, Swamp Waters, with the associated pH criterion of 4.3 to 9.0 SU. An associated DO criterion is currently being developed from swamp water data. A TMDL is not needed for these waters. An assessment category of 4C will be assigned until the waterbody has been re-classified.

II. NATURAL CONDITION ASSESSMENT

Following a description of the watershed (including geology, soils, climate, and land use), a description of the DO and/or pH water quality problem (including a data summary, time series and monthly data distributions), and a description of the water quality criteria that were the basis for the impairment determination, the available information should be evaluated in four steps.

Step 1. Determine appearance and flow/slope.

Streams or stream segments that have naturally low DO (< 4 mg/L) and low pH (< 6 SU) are characterized by very low slopes and low velocity flows (flat water with low reaeration rates). Decaying vegetation in such swampy waters provides large inputs of plant material that consumes oxygen as it decays. The decaying vegetation in a swamp water also produces acids and decreases pH. Plant materials contain polyphenols such as tannin and lignin. Polyphenols and partially degraded polyphenols build up in the form of tannic acids, humic acids, and fulvic acids that are highly colored. The trees of swamps have higher polyphenolic content than the soft-stemmed vegetation of marshes. Swamp streams (blackwater) are therefore more highly colored and more acidic than marsh streams.

Appearance and flow velocity (or slope if flow velocity is not available) must be identified for each stream or stream segment to be assessed for natural conditions and potential re-classification as a Class VII swamp water. This can be done through maps, photos, field measurements or other appropriate means.

Step 2. Determine nutrient levels.

Excessive nutrients can cause a decrease in DO in relatively slow moving systems, where aeration is low. High nutrient levels are an indication of anthropogenic inputs of nitrogen, phosphorus, and possibly organic matter. Nutrient input can stimulate plant growth, and the resulting die-off and decay of excessive plankton or macrophytes can decrease DO levels.

USGS (1999) estimated national background nutrient concentrations in streams and groundwater from undeveloped areas. Average nitrate background concentrations are less than 0.6 mg/L for streams, average total nitrogen (TN) background concentrations are less than 1.0 mg/L, and average background concentrations of total phosphorus (TP) are less than 0.1 mg/L.

Nutrient levels must be documented for each stream or stream segment to be assessed for natural conditions and potential re-classification as a Class VII swamp water.

Streams with average concentrations of nutrients greater than the national background concentrations should be further evaluated for potential impacts from anthropogenic sources.

Step 3. Determine degree of seasonal fluctuation (for DO only).

Anthropogenic impacts on DO will likely disrupt the typical seasonal fluctuation seen in the DO concentrations of wetland streams. Seasonal analyses should be conducted for each potential Class VII stream or stream segment to verify that DO is depressed in the summer months and recovers during the winter, as would be expected in natural systems. A weak seasonal pattern could indicate that human inputs from point or nonpoint sources are impacting the seasonal cycle.

Step 4. Determine anthropogenic impacts.

Every effort should be made to identify human impacts that could exacerbate the naturally low DO and/or pH. For example, point sources should be identified and DMR data analyzed to determine if there is any impact on the stream DO or pH concentrations. Land use analysis can also be a valuable tool for identifying potential human impacts.

Lastly, a discussion of acid rain impacts should be included for low pH waters. The format of this discussion can be based either on the process used for the recent Class VII classification of several streams in the Blackwater watershed of the Chowan Basin (letter from DEQ to EPA, 14 October 2003). An alternative is a prototype regional stream comparison developed for Fourmile Creek, White Oak Swamp, Matadequin Creek and Mechumps Creek (all east of the fall line). The example analysis under IV in this document, or the example report prepared for Fourmile Creek, illustrate this approach. For streams west of the fall line, a regional stream comparison for 2004 analyses encompasses Winticomack, Winterpock, and Skinquarter Creeks.

7Q10 Data Screen

If the data warrant it, a data screen should be performed to ensure that the impairment was identified based on valid data. All DO or pH data that violate water quality standards should be screened for flows less than the 7Q10. Data collected on days when flow was < 7Q10 should be eliminated from the data set and the violation rate recalculated accordingly. Only those waters with violation rates determined days with flows > or = 7Q10 flows should be classified as impaired.

In some cases, data were collected when flow was 0 cfs. If the 7Q10 is identified as 0 cfs as well, all data collected under 0 cfs flow would need to be considered in the water quality assessment. In those cases, the impairment should be classified as 4C, Impaired due to natural conditions, no TMDL needed. However, a reclassification to Class VII may not always be appropriate.

III. Natural Condition Conclusion Matrix

The following decision process should be applied for determining whether low pH and/or low DO values are due to natural conditions and justify a reclassification of a stream or stream segment as Class VII, Swamp Water.

> If velocity is low or if slope is low (<0.50%) AND
> If wetlands are present along stream reach AND
> If no point sources or only point sources with minimal impact on DO and pH AND
> If nutrients are < typical background
> - ❖ average (= assessment period mean) nitrate less than 0.6 mg/L
> - ❖ average total nitrogen (TN) less than 1.0 mg/L, and
> - ❖ average total phosphorus (TP) are less than 0.1 mg/L AND
>
> For DO: If seasonal fluctuation is normal AND
> For pH: If nearby streams without wetlands meet pH criteria OR if no correlation between in-stream pH and rain pH,
>
> THEN determine as impaired due to natural condition
> → assess as category 4C in next assessment
> → initiate WQS reclassification to Class VII Swamp Water
> → get credit under consent decree

The analysis must state the extent of the natural condition based on the criteria outlined above. A map showing land use, point sources, water quality stations and, if necessary, the delineated segment to be classified as swamp water should be included.

In cases where not all of these criteria apply, a case by case argument must be made based on the specific conditions in the watershed.

6. Natural Conditions Assessment for Fourmile Creek

6.1 Slope and Appearance

The hydrologic slope from the 80 ft topographic contour at rivermile 5.57 just above Doran Rd downstream to the 10 ft contour at rivermile 1.89 just below Griggs Pond, a distance of 3.68 rivermiles, is estimated at 0.36%, which is considered low slope. The low slope is not indicative of human impact.

Visual inspection downstream of bridges at Rt. 5 (Figure 12) and Doran Rd. (Figure 13) revealed swampy conditions with heavy tree canopy. There are large inputs of decaying vegetation from large areas of forested land throughout the watershed, including considerable pine forest, that produce organic acids and lower pH as they decay. The wetlands and large forested area acid impacts are not indicative of human impact.

Figure 12. Fourmile Creek at Rt. 5.

Figure 13. Fourmile Creek at Doran Rd.

6.2 Instream Nutrients

The VADEQ collected nutrient data from station 2-FOM003.60 from July 1990 to November 2003, plus one visit to Sweeney Creek, a tributary of Bailey Creek, in 2002. The average nutrient concentrations are below the USGS (1999) national background nutrient concentrations in streams from undeveloped areas levels of nitrate < 0.6 mg/l; TN (TKN + NO_3 + NO_2) < 1.0 mg/l; and TP < 0.1 mg/l. These low nutrient levels are not indicative of human impact.

Parameter	Average Conc.	Number
Total Phosphorous	**0.048 mg/l**	(n=60)
Orthophosphorous	0.022 mg/l	(n=52)
Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen	0.48 mg/l	(n=57)
Ammonia as N	0.043 mg/l	(n=60)
Nitrate as N	**0.322 mg/l**	(n=51)
Nitrite as N	0.008 mg/l	(n=51)
TN (TKN + NO_3 + NO_2)	**0.81 mg/l**	(n=51)

6.3 Impact from Point Source Dischargers and Land Use

Three permitted point sources discharge in the Fourmile Creek watershed.

Table 7. VPDES, VPA, and VAG point source facilities in the Fourmile Creek watershed

Stream Name	Facility Name	VPDES Permit Number	Discharge Type[1]	Design Flow (MGD)	Permitted pH limits
Entire Bailey Creek Portion of Four Mile Creek Watershed	Henrico County Separate Storm Sewer System	VA0088617	MS4	NL	NA
UT to Bailey Creek	Camp Holly Springs	VA0091154	Industrial Minor	NL	6 - 9
UT to Deerlick Creek	West Sand & Gravel – McNeil Plant	VAG844017	Industrial Minor	NL	6 - 9

[1]MS4 = Municipal Separate Stormwater Sewer System; NL = No limit, NA = Not applicable

Permittees - West Sand and Gravel (VAG844017) reported in 2003 a min pH 4.25 at 0.19 cfs maximum flow to Deerlick Branch, which is **considered insignificant at such low flow, but may indicate low groundwater pH.** Camp Holly Springs (VA0091154) reported monthly in 2003 pH ranging from 6.91 to 8.54 at flow 0.007 mgd, which is **considered no low pH impact**. Henrico Multiple Separate Stormwater Sewer System (MS4) (VA0088617) does not report pH, but would not be expected to cause low pH.

Land Use - High Intensity Residential, and Commercial / Industrial land use comprised 1.96 % of watershed (264 ac), located in the western headwaters only. The watershed is predominately forested (67 percent), with 1.1 percent wetlands and open water. However, human E. coli impairment was identified at 22% of annual bacterial load, therefore it is possible that human activities impact the watershed.

Very minor acidic inputs by one permittee, and minor contribution from residential and commercial / industrial land use do not constitute a significant human impact.

6.4 Human Impact from Acid Deposition

Acid deposition is expected to occur in the Fourmile Creek watershed, however rainfall pH data are difficult to collect and do not exist near Fourmile Creek. The closest available rainfall pH data come from the National Atmospheric Deposition Program /NTN station in Charlottesville, VA. Acid deposition occurred in the Charlottesville dataset, with weekly rainfall pH during the period from 1990 to 2003 averaging 4.35 SU (SD = 0.277, n = 428), with a minimum of 3.43 SU and maximum of 5.29 SU. According to an EPA web site (http://www.epa.gov/airmarkets/acidrain/index.html) the natural pH of rain is about 5.5.

One method to assess whether acid deposition adversely impacts low pH in a waterbody is to compare pH of the subject watershed with surrounding watersheds. If acid rain has an impact, all stations should have similar low pH impairments. This is not the case with Fourmile Creek and all surrounding watersheds.

There are ten VADEQ monitoring stations in watersheds within 24 miles of Fourmile Creek, which have from 5 to 15 years of pH data. Half (5) of the stations within 16 miles to the west and northwest of Fourmile Creek above the Fall line have higher pH and no pH impairments (mean pH 6.61 - 7.05). These are Upham Brook, Reedy, Goode, Falling, and Swift Creeks.

Half (5) of the stations within 24 miles to the east and southeast of Fourmile Creek below the Fall line have low pH and natural low pH impairments (mean pH 5.70 - 6.34). These are Matadequin Creek, Chickahominy River, White Oak Swamp, Gunns Run and Morris Creek.

The difference in pH above and below the Fall line appears to be more related to increased buffering capacity of geologic origin from watersheds above the Fall line, and swampwater naturally low in pH from low slope and excessive plant material decay below the Fall line than it is to acid deposition, which is expected to be uniform east and west of the Fall line. However the extent to which stream pH is decreased by acid deposition cannot be determined. Significant human impact from acid deposition is inconclusive.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The following decision process is proposed for determining whether low pH values are due to natural conditions:

If slope is low (<0.50) AND
If wetlands are present along stream reach AND
If no point sources or point sources with minimal impact on pH AND
If nutrients are < typical background

- average (= assessment period mean) nitrate less than 0.6 mg/L
- average total nitrogen (TN) less than 1.0 mg/L, and
- average total phosphorus (TP) are less than 0.1 mg/L AND

If nearby streams without wetlands meet pH criteria,

THEN determine as impaired due to natural condition
→ assess as category 4C in next assessment
→ initiate WQS reclassification to Class VII Swamp Water
→ get credit under consent decree

Fourmile Creek exhibits low slope with significant wetlands, and large areas of forested land including pine forests. These contribute large inputs of decaying vegetation, which produce organic acids and lower pH as they decay. These are not considered anthropogenic impacts.

Fourmile Creek exhibits low nutrient concentrations below national background levels in streams from undeveloped areas, which not indicative of human impact.

Three permittees have insignificant low pH impact. Residential / Commercial land use (< 2%) has only a minor pH effect on the headwaters area. There is no pH impact observed downstream at Rt. 5 attributed to human activity.

Lack of buffering capacity due to soil composition and vegetative decay in swampy watersheds below the Fall appear to impact instream low pH more than acid deposition. However the extent to which stream pH is decreased by acid deposition cannot be conclusively determined.

A change in the water quality standards classification to Class VII Swampwater due to natural conditions, rather than a TMDL, is indicated for of Fourmile Creek and its tributaries to their headwaters.

8.0. Public Participation

The development of the Fourmile Creek low pH natural condition assessment is not possible without public participation. A Technical Advisory Committee meeting was held at the Piedmont Regional Office training room in Glen Allen, VA at 2 p.m. on January 13, 2004. A public meeting was held at the Fairfield Area Library, 1001 North Laburnum Avenue, Richmond, VA. at 7 p.m. on January 29, 2004 to discuss the process for low pH natural condition assessment. Twelve persons attended the public meeting. Copies of the presentation materials were available for public distribution. The public meeting was public noticed in the Virginia Register. There was a 30-day public comment period after the public meeting. Fourteen questions were asked at the public meeting, and three written comments were mailed to DEQ. These comments and responses dealt with the bacterial impairment and were submitted to EPA separately from this document.

9.0 References

Maptech, Methodology for Assessing Natural Dissolved Oxygen and pH Impairments: Application to the Appomattox River Watershed, Virginia. 2003.

SRCC (Southeast Regional Climate Center)
http://www.dnr.state.sc.us/climate/sercc/products/historical/historical_va.html (Accessed 12/18/02)

USGS (United States Geological Survey), National Background Nutrient Concentrations in Streams from Undeveloped Areas. 1999.

VADEQ (Virginia Department of Environmental Quality), Virginia Water Quality Assessment 1998. Virginia. 1998.

VADEQ (Virginia Department of Environmental Quality), Virginia Water Quality Assessment 2002. Virginia. 2002.

Appendix A

Glossary

GLOSSARY

Note: All entries in italics are taken from USEPA (1998). All non-italicized entries are taken from MapTech (2002).

303(d). A section of the Clean Water Act of 1972 requiring states to identify and list water bodies that do not meet the states' water quality standards.

Ambient water quality. *Natural concentration of water quality constituents prior to mixing of either point or nonpoint source load of contaminants. Reference ambient concentration is used to indicate the concentration of a chemical that will not cause adverse impact on human health.*

Anthropogenic. *Pertains to the [environmental] influence of human activities.*

Background levels. *Levels representing the chemical, physical, and Bacterial conditions that would result from natural geomorphological processes such as weathering or dissolution.*

Best management practices (BMPs). *Methods, measures, or practices determined to be reasonable and cost-effective means for a landowner to meet certain, generally nonpoint source, pollution control needs. BMPs include structural and nonstructural controls and operation and maintenance procedures.*

Clean Water Act (CWA). *The Clean Water Act (formerly referred to as the Federal Water Pollution Control Act or Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972), Public Law 92-500, as amended by Public Law 96-483 and Public Law 97-117, 33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq. The Clean Water Act (CWA) contains a number of provisions to restore and maintain the quality of the nation's water resources. One of these provisions is section 303(d), which establishes the TMDL program.*

Concentration. *Amount of a substance or material in a given unit volume of solution; usually measured in milligrams per liter (mg/L) or parts per million (ppm).*

Confluence. The point at which a river and its tributary flow together.

Contamination. *The act of polluting or making impure; any indication of chemical, sediment, or Bacterial impurities.*

Designated uses. *Those uses specified in water quality standards for each waterbody or segment whether or not they are being attained.*

Dilution. *The addition of some quantity of less-concentrated liquid (water) that results in a decrease in the original concentration.*

Direct runoff. *Water that flows over the ground surface or through the ground directly into streams, rivers, and lakes.*

Discharge. *Flow of surface water in a stream or canal, or the outflow of groundwater from a flowing artesian well, ditch, or spring. Can also apply to discharge of liquid effluent from a facility or to chemical emissions into the air through designated venting mechanisms.*

Discharge permits (under VPDES). *A permit issued by the U.S. EPA or a state regulatory agency that sets specific limits on the type and amount of pollutants that a municipality or industry can discharge to a receiving water; it also includes a compliance schedule for achieving those limits. The permit process was established under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, under provisions of the Federal Clean Water Act.*

Domestic wastewater. *Also called sanitary wastewater, consists of wastewater discharged from residences and from commercial, institutional, and similar facilities.*

Drainage basin. *A part of a land area enclosed by a topographic divide from which direct surface runoff from precipitation normally drains by gravity into a receiving water. Also referred to as a watershed, river basin, or hydrologic unit.*

Effluent. *Municipal sewage or industrial liquid waste (untreated, partially treated, or completely treated) that flows out of a treatment plant, septic system, pipe, etc.*

Effluent limitation. *Restrictions established by a state or EPA on quantities, rates, and concentrations in pollutant discharges.*

Existing use. *Use actually attained in the waterbody on or after November 28, 1975, whether or not it is included in the water quality standards (40 CFR 131.3).*

GIS. Geographic Information System. A system of hardware, software, data, people, organizations and institutional arrangements for collecting, storing, analyzing and disseminating information about areas of the earth. (Dueker and Kjerne, 1989)

Hydrologic cycle. *The circuit of water movement from the atmosphere to the earth and its return to the atmosphere through various stages or processes, such as precipitation, interception, runoff, infiltration, storage, evaporation, and transpiration.*

Hydrology. *The study of the distribution, properties, and effects of water on the earth's surface, in the soil and underlying rocks, and in the atmosphere.*

In situ. *In place; in situ measurements consist of measurements of components or processes in a full-scale system or a field, rather than in a laboratory.*

Margin of safety (MOS). *A required component of the TMDL that accounts for the uncertainty about the relationship between the pollutant loads and the quality of the receiving waterbody (CWA section 303(d)(1)(C)). The MOS is normally incorporated into the conservative assumptions used to develop TMDLs (generally within the calculations or models) and approved by EPA either individually or in state/EPA agreements. If the MOS needs to be larger than that which is allowed through the* *conservative assumptions, additional MOS can be added as a separate component of the TMDL (in this case, quantitatively, a TMDL = LC = WLA + LA + MOS).*

Mean. The sum of the values in a data set divided by the number of values in the data set.

MGD. Million gallons per day. A unit of water flow, whether discharge or withdraw.

Monitoring. *Periodic or continuous surveillance or testing to determine the level of compliance with statutory requirements and/or pollutant levels in various media or in humans, plants, and animals.*

Narrative criteria. *Nonquantitative guidelines that describe the desired water quality goals.*

National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). *The national program for issuing, modifying, revoking and re-issuing, terminating, monitoring, and enforcing permits, and imposing and enforcing pretreatment requirements, under sections 307, 402, 318, and 405 of the Clean Water Act.*

Natural waters. *Flowing water within a physical system that has developed without human intervention, in which natural processes continue to take place.*

Non-point source. *Pollution that originates from multiple sources over a relatively large area. Nonpoint sources can be divided into source activities related to either land or water use including failing septic tanks, improper animal-keeping practices, forest practices, and urban and rural runoff.*

Numeric targets. *A measurable value determined for the pollutant of concern, which, if achieved, is expected to result in the attainment of water quality standards in the listed waterbody.*

Organic matter. *The organic fraction that includes plant and animal residue at various stages of decomposition, cells and tissues of soil organisms, and substances synthesized by the soil population. Commonly determined as the amount of organic material contained in a soil or water sample.*

Peak runoff. *The highest value of the stage or discharge attained by a flood or storm event; also referred to as flood peak or peak discharge.*

Permit. *An authorization, license, or equivalent control document issued by EPA or an approved federal, state, or local agency to implement the requirements of an environmental regulation; e.g., a permit to operate a wastewater treatment plant or to operate a facility that may generate harmful emissions.*

Point source. *Pollutant loads discharged at a specific location from pipes, outfalls, and conveyance channels from either municipal wastewater treatment plants or industrial waste treatment facilities. Point sources can also include pollutant loads contributed by tributaries to the main receiving water stream or river.*

Pollutant. *Dredged spoil, solid waste, incinerator residue, sewage, garbage, sewage sludge, munitions, chemical wastes, Bacterial materials, radioactive materials, heat, wrecked or discarded equipment, rock, sand, cellar dirt, and industrial, municipal, and agricultural waste discharged into water. (CWA section 502(6)).*

Pollution. *Generally, the presence of matter or energy whose nature, location, or quantity produces undesired environmental effects. Under the Clean Water Act, for example, the term is defined as the man-made or man-induced alteration of the physical, Bacterial, chemical, and radiological integrity of water.*

Public comment period. *The time allowed for the public to express its views and concerns regarding action by EPA or states (e.g., a Federal Register notice of a proposed rule-making, a public notice of a draft permit, or a Notice of Intent to Deny).*

Raw sewage. *Untreated municipal sewage.*

Receiving waters. *Creeks, streams, rivers, lakes, estuaries, ground-water formations, or other bodies of water into which surface water and/or treated or untreated waste are discharged, either naturally or in man-made systems.*

Restoration. *Return of an ecosystem to a close approximation of its presumed condition prior to disturbance.*

Riparian areas. *Areas bordering streams, lakes, rivers, and other watercourses. These areas have high water tables and support plants that require saturated soils during all or part of the year. Riparian areas include both wetland and upland zones.*

Riparian zone. *The border or banks of a stream. Although this term is sometimes used interchangeably with floodplain, the riparian zone is generally regarded as relatively narrow compared to a floodplain. The duration of flooding is generally much shorter, and the timing less predictable, in a riparian zone than in a river floodplain.*

Runoff. *That part of precipitation, snowmelt, or irrigation water that runs off the land into streams or other surface water. It can carry pollutants from the air and land into receiving waters.*

Slope. *The degree of inclination to the horizontal. Usually expressed as a ratio, such as 1:25 or 1 on 25, indicating one unit vertical rise in 25 units of horizontal distance, or in a decimal fraction (0.04), degrees (2 degrees 18 minutes), or percent (4 percent).*

Stakeholder. Any person with a vested interest in assessment of natural condition or TMDL development.

Standard. In reference to water quality (e.g. pH 6 – 9 SU limit).

Storm runoff. *Storm water runoff, snowmelt runoff, and surface runoff and drainage; rainfall that does not evaporate or infiltrate the ground because of impervious land* *surfaces or a soil infiltration rate lower than rainfall intensity, but instead flows onto adjacent land or into waterbodies or is routed into a drain or sewer system.*

Streamflow. *Discharge that occurs in a natural channel. Although the term "discharge" can be applied to the flow of a canal, the word "streamflow" uniquely describes the discharge in a surface stream course. The term "streamflow" is more general than "runoff" since streamflow may be applied to discharge whether or not it is affected by diversion or regulation.*

Stream restoration. *Various techniques used to replicate the hydrological, morphological, and ecological features that have been lost in a stream because of urbanization, farming, or other disturbance.*

Surface area. *The area of the surface of a waterbody; best measured by planimetry or the use of a geographic information system.*

Surface runoff. *Precipitation, snowmelt, or irrigation water in excess of what can infiltrate the soil surface and be stored in small surface depressions; a major transporter of nonpoint source pollutants.*

Surface water. *All water naturally open to the atmosphere (rivers, lakes, reservoirs, ponds, streams, impoundments, seas, estuaries, etc.) and all springs, wells, or other collectors directly influenced by surface water.*

Topography. *The physical features of a geographic surface area including relative elevations and the positions of natural and man-made features.*

Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). *The sum of the individual wasteload allocations (WLAs) for point sources, load allocations (LAs) for nonpoint sources and natural background, plus a margin of safety (MOS). TMDLs can be expressed in terms of mass per time, toxicity, or other appropriate measures that relate to a state's water quality standard.*

Tributary. *A lower order-stream compared to a receiving waterbody. "Tributary to" indicates the largest stream into which the reported stream or tributary flows.*

Variance. A measure of the variability of a data set. The sum of the squared deviations (observation – mean) divided by (number of observations) – 1.

DCR. Department of Conservation and Recreation.

DEQ. Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

VDH. Virginia Department of Health.

Wastewater. *Usually refers to effluent from a sewage treatment plant. See also* ***Domestic wastewater****.*

Wastewater treatment. *Chemical, Bacterial, and mechanical procedures applied to an industrial or municipal discharge or to any other sources of contaminated water to remove, reduce, or neutralize contaminants.*

Water quality. *The Bacterial, chemical, and physical conditions of a waterbody. It is a measure of a waterbody's ability to support beneficial uses.*

Water quality criteria. *Elements of the board's water quality standards, expressed as constituent concentrations, levels, or narrative statements, representing a quality of water that supports a particular use. When criteria are met, water quality will generally protect the designated use.*

Water quality standard. *Provisions of state or federal law which consist of a designated use or uses for the waters of the Commonwealth and water quality criteria for such waters based upon such uses. Water quality standards are to protect the public health or welfare, enhance the quality of water and serve the purposes of the State Water Control Law (§ 62.1-44.2 et seq. of the Code of Virginia) and the federal Clean Water Act (33 USC § 1251 et seq.).*

Watershed. *A drainage area or basin in which all land and water areas drain or flow toward a central collector such as a stream, river, or lake at a lower elevation.*